

# Zambia Newsletter

October 2003

Just one look at this redesigned Newsletter tells of something that is very new and different! Lorie and I have just made the decision within the last few weeks to return to full-time mission work in Africa. This has been a long time coming. For more than six years (since I began making annual mission trips to teach in Nigeria and India) we have been giving serious and prayerful consideration to this possibility. We knew that we would one day return to Africa, but we didn't quite believe it would be so soon. But, God has opened doors for us now!

It seems that word got out this past year that we were interested in going to Africa to teach Bible (leadership training). This past Spring I got several calls from individuals working with schools in Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, and India. Lorie and I had already planned to teach in India this past year (see last month's Newsletter), so we decided to stop off in Ghana and Zambia on our way to India to survey these possibilities. We had already visited the two schools in Nigeria that we were considering (past mission trips). And, although the school we visited in India is truly a great work, we decided that India is somewhat outside our past experience in missions and that securing visas for India would be problematic. We were also most impressed with the two schools that we visited in Ghana, so impressed, however, that we decided these ministries are thriving without American involvement and that we are far more needed elsewhere in Africa. This, then, left us with three options: Zambia and the two schools in Nigeria. After much prayer and consideration, we chose Zambia simply because Zambia evidence the greatest need for leadership training.

It is most surprising that Zambia has never had a preacher training school (except for a school operated by the non-institutional churches on the border of Zimbabwe). Although Zambia is one of our oldest mission works in Africa (dating back to the 1920's), Zambia has not experienced the kind of growth that has taken place elsewhere in Africa (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, etc). In fact, the growth of the church in Zambia has become somewhat stagnant in the last thirty years. The primary reason for this has to do with the lack of leadership training. Those desiring to attend a school of preaching must travel all the way to Kenya or Swaziland - a distance of more than 1000 miles.

Church leaders in Zambia have been well aware of this need for quite some time. More than fifteen years ago, they bought a 22 acre plot of land near Lusaka in order to start such a school. Several efforts were made, but nothing ever really materialized. Then, last year, these leaders made an appeal to the Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, TX to help them with this project. After several trips to Zambia and realizing the great need for such a Bible school, Sunset agreed to take on this challenge. Sunset then contacted me about becoming the dean of this new school. Upon our return in September, we then accepted this invitation. Sunset will provide the funding for the school itself; but, it will be necessary for me to raise my own personal support.

Let me explain why Zambia so badly needs a school dedicated to training church leaders. First, as I have just stated, the churches of Zambia have very few leaders who have received any training (since there has never been a school dedicated to leadership training). This is one of the primary reason why the church has not grown in Zambia.

Second, as a consequence of the leadership deficit, there is the related problem of spiritual immaturity in the church. Africans are becoming Christians at the rate of 20,000 per day. In fact, the church in Africa has nearly doubled in just the last twenty years. But, such phenomenal growth only increases the demand for more trained leaders who can lead these new Christians on to maturity in Christ. Yet, at the very moment the demand for leadership training has increased, the number of missionaries in Africa (who can provide training) has dropped by more than a third in just the last ten years. The result is acute immaturity. Bible knowledge is woefully inadequate and the continual reliance on witchcraft and divination remains strong in our churches.

If this is true of Africa in general, it is especially true of Zambia where there is no school for leadership training! As a consequence, our churches in Zambia are suffering from a superficial knowledge of the Christian faith and are still walking in the ways of the world (witchcraft). It is estimated that there are 45,000 members of the church in Zambia with 831 churches. These churches will not mature in Christ until we develop some means to provide adequate leadership.

Third, Zambia needs a renewal in evangelism and church-planting. Most unlike the rest of Africa, the growth of the church in Zambia has become somewhat stagnant in the last 30-40 years. Also of great concern is the fact that 62% of our members live in just one of Zambia's eight provinces: the southern province (home to the Tonga tribe). Each of the other eight provinces represent only about 5% of our members. Consequently, most people in Zambia identify the Church of Christ as a Tonga-tribe religion. One of our primary objectives in starting this school in Lusaka is to facilitate a renewal in evangelism throughout the country and to shift the center of the church out of the Tonga region so as to create a national identity for the church. We envision the school becoming a mechanism for encouraging new church plantings throughout Zambia, especially in the more populated regions of Lusaka, the Copperbelt, and the Northern province. We see this school as a means for fueling a new wave of evangelistic activity in Zambia.

The challenge of urban evangelism represents a fourth reason why we need this school in Zambia. Most of our past missionary work in Africa (and especially in Zambia) has been dedicated to rural efforts. We have done little to evangelize the cities of Africa since the bulk of the population lived as farmers in the rural areas. But, this is now changing. Africa is moving to the cities in huge numbers. And, nowhere is this more true than in Zambia. It is estimated that 50% of Zambia are now city-dwellers – a trend that is expected only to increase in the years to come. One of our reasons for locating the school in Lusaka is so that we might facilitate the growth of the church in Lusaka and use Lusaka as a context in which to train our students for urban evangelism. In fact, it is our hope to take students on numerous campaigns to plant and mature new churches in the cities of Zambia.

A fifth reason why we need this school in Zambia has to do with the spread of Islam into Africa where it is now growing twice as fast as Christianity. Research indicates that Islam is currently spreading down the eastern side of Africa and into the southern regions of the continent. Zambia is now “ground zero” for the advance of Islam into southern Africa. Fueled with large sums of Arab oil-money, Muslim missionaries are now building primary schools all over Zambia in an effort to convert the next generation of Zambians. We need desperately to train new leaders who can confront Islam and halt its advance into Africa.

Finally, there is the need to evangelize those regions of Africa where we have yet to plant churches. Studies show that 90% of all our members in Africa live in just 10 of Africa's 57 countries! There are many reasons why we haven't evangelized these other countries, but it has to do primarily with the instability and civil war that has plagued most of them for several decades. Zambia is of particular interest because it is centrally located to many of these countries. The Congo is one good example (borders the north of Zambia). This is a country of more than 55 million people; yet, it is a country with only 550 members of the church! Angola (west of Zambia) is a nation of ten million with no members of the church. There are, in fact, seven countries that border Zambia and all but one are countries where the church is either weak or almost non-existent. One of our dreams for this new school in Zambia to train and encourage Africans to serve as missionaries to these countries!

It is for these reasons that we have chosen Zambia as the place where we believe we are most needed right now. But, our immediate concern right now has to do with raising the support that we will need to make this vision a reality. We are right now in the process of transitioning from our ministry here in Wilmington to full-time, fund-raising activities. The Sycamore View congregation in Memphis, TN has agreed to serve as our sponsoring congregation. At some point after the first of the year, it will become necessary that we move to Memphis in order to be more centrally located for fund-raising purposes. Our goal is to secure all the necessary support by August and move to Zambia in the Fall of 2004.

We are, of course, launching out in faith and I must confess that I find this all rather frightening for the moment. The Pine Valley congregation (where I have been preaching) has agreed to continuing our support for several months as we make this transition. This means, however, that we must raise a lot of monthly support in a very short period of time or we will end up in a very desperate financial situation by May/June. With Sycamore View's sponsorship, we will begin this process with 20% of our monthly support – a good start but a

long way from what we will need. Nevertheless, we are convinced that God has been opening doors to make all this possible and we are confident that God will bring this to a successful completion! Many of you have given us support in the past and we desperately need to ask you to consider becoming a supporter of this ministry. And, we need for you to keep us in your prayers as we launching out in what is a most challenging new direction for us in ministry.

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